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## Stories From the Field

### Empowering Female Home Owners to Repair Damaged Homes in the North

#### Killinochchi District, Northern Province, Sri Lanka



The “Support to Conflict Affected People through Housing” project is a housing recovery initiative supporting returning Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the North of Sri Lanka. Funded primarily through a Grant of € 11.8 million by European Union (EU), it is built on the previous EU investment in reconstruction notably in the housing sector through the North East Housing Reconstruction Programme (NEHRP). Additional donors include the Australian Government (AusAID) and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). Jointly implemented by UN-Habitat and SDC, the project provides cash grants

and technical support to home owners in the districts of Vavuniya, Mannar, Mullaitivu and Killinochchi to reconstruct and repair their conflict damaged houses.

Mrs. Ganesamoorthy Anton Catherine, a 38 year old mother of two children, is a project beneficiary who has recently completed repairing her damaged home in Killinochchi District.

Catherine is a single mother from Malayalapuram GN Division located in Karachchi DS division in Killinochchi district. Separated from her husband over ten years ago, she is the sole bread winner of her family consisting of her two children and elderly parents. Her sons, aged 12 and 15 years, are studying at the Don Bosco Institute in Kalutara District with financial support from the Church Authorities. Receiving no financial support from her husband since their separation in 2003, Catherine currently earns a living by jointly managing a Cooperative shop and by selling produce from her home garden.

Catherine originally hails from an estate in Ratnapura District in the central hills of Sri Lanka. Displaced during the ethnic riots that swept the country in 1983 Catherine, then 8 years old, relocated to Killinochchi District with her parents and three brothers. Her family purchased a plot of land in Malayalapuram village where they built a temporary shelter. During the ensuing years, the family was displaced multiple times due to the three decades of conflict. Despite numerous hardships, Catherine succeeded in building a permanent house for the family in 2005 with her savings and monthly salary as an Office Assistant in Killinochchi and by pawning her jewelry. Recalling the hardships faced during the time of the house construction, Catherine and her parents remember how they fetched water every morning from the neighbours’ wells for construction activities as their well had dried up. Once completed, their permanent house consisted of two bedrooms, a living room, kitchen and attached toilet.

In 2008, with the escalation of the conflict, Catherine, along with her parents, brothers and two children, were compelled to leave their home and move to several locations in the North, finally moving to Mulaivaikal in Mullaitivu District during the last stages of the conflict. Following the end of the conflict in May 2009, the family were relocated to Menik Farm Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Camp in Vavuniya District where they lived for nearly two years with thousands of other IDPs. Catherine and her family eventually returned to Malayalapuram in July 2010. However, their house had been badly damaged during the conflict with the roof completely destroyed and the walls significantly damaged requiring major repairs to bring it back into use. As the family had no savings or regular income, they had no means of repairing the house. Catherine



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constructed a temporary shelter with tin sheets and cadjan, where she lived with her parents for over a year. Recalling the hardships faced by the family during these years, Catherine states “I had already pawned my jewelry to construct our permanent house in 2005. With no regular income or livelihood, I had given up hope of repairing the house”.



In March 2012, Catherine was selected as a beneficiary for housing repair assistance by the project. As a female head of household, Catherine was provided with priority assistance. Catherine received a cash grant of LKR 250,000 in four installments which enabled her to rebuild the roof and walls including plastering and painting, completing the work in four months. After Catherine’s family moved into their permanent home, they gave their temporary shelter to another returnee family.

Technical assistance was provided by UN-Habitat for the construction activities including selecting skilled workers such as masons and carpenters and purchasing quality building materials such as sand, bricks, roofing timbers and tiles. Catherine, as the household head, was responsible for the planning, implementation and monitoring of the repair work with the assistance of the UN-Habitat Technical Officer and Engineer. Similar to other families selected under this project, Catherine and her family contributed their own labour funds towards the house repair in the spirit of the “home owner driven” process.

As Catherine faces many financial challenges bringing up her two children as a single parent, she was very happy to be selected for housing support. “When I remember the hardships I underwent during the past few years, I couldn’t even think of undertaking minor repairs to the house. I was so happy when I was selected as a beneficiary for this housing project. I am thankful to the donors for providing us with a cash grant to repair our house and for giving me the courage to repair the house through my own efforts”.

Catherine is currently operating a cooperative shop in Malayapuram village with a group of six women who are also heads of their households. The shop provides sustainable livelihoods for vulnerable, female headed families in the village. The income derived from the shop is shared among the families. Catherine earns a monthly income of LKR. 2,000 LKR – 3,000 selling products such as milk toffee, biscuits, red rice flour, Ulundu (Orid) flour, Vadai and chili powder. In addition to her earnings from the shop, Catherine grows vegetables and fruit including bananas, oranges, cashew, cassava and drumsticks in her home garden, supplementing her income. The lack of a proper functioning well in her premises is one of the main drawbacks faced by Catherine in obtaining a higher yield from her garden. Their 40 foot well tends to dry up during the dry season and Catherine is seeking assistance towards its renovation.



The **Support to Conflict Affected People Through Housing in Sri Lanka** project is supporting over 5,000 families to reconstruct and repair their conflict damaged houses in the Northern Province. Empowering women to actively participate and manage the housing reconstruction process is one of the key objectives of the project. This project will be completed in early 2014.

**Photographs: Catherine in her back garden discussing house repair; Catherine next to the temporary shelter that was occupied by her family after returning from the IDP camp; The family in front of their recently repaired permanent house in Malayapuram; Catherine at work in the Malayapuram cooperative shop.**